

New Fiction

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Nathan Hale, the Army that had never been licked, the Government of the People, by the People and for the People, that was better than any other Government on the face of the earth.

Now the sneer is, of course, measurably justified; especially of such a Chicago crowd as that of the story, but it is nevertheless true that the older, English thinking "Tradition of the United States" is not wholly dead nor to be killed by a sneer. It is also unhappily true that it is, and possibly always will be, quite incomprehensible to the Oriental-American mind. And that is a very large part of what is the matter with contemporary American society. Such books as this are useful, beyond the author's intent or suspicion, in bringing out that fact.

These disagreeable people are not travesties, with the possible exception of Aubrey Gilchrist, the popular novelist, who is a little overdrawn. The book centers upon George Basine, whom we meet on the doorstep of a brothel, at dawn, after a debauch in the spring of 1900, and whom we leave a United States Senator during the middle years of the war. He is not exactly oversensual, as his driving force is rather ambition; he is a subtly drawn figure. Of his two sisters, Fanny is the animal woman, the kind of girl who finds the dictionary good reading by seeking out all the obscene words she can find and who gloats over medical treatises. Doris is presented as more intellectual, though scarcely less passionate, and after her love affair with the crazy Scandinavian "poet of the people" peters out she finally goes insane. The mother is more nearly normal; largely a frustrate, incomplete life. Basine foolishly allows himself to be trapped into a loveless and even passionless marriage with the hen-minded Henrietta, but remains faithful to her, largely through cowardice.

The minor people are admirably done; especially old Ramsay, the effeminate, pathological abnormality who develops into a blackmailer. The only character for whom the author seems to have a real admiration is the German, Schroder, who wanders in and out of the plot merely to seduce one woman or another, and who departs placidly when his work is done. There is at least no hypocrisy about him. But space limitations forbid any detailed examination of the large company of highly interesting and always repulsive people.

Mr. Hecht's style is sometimes annoyingly staccato. The narrative lacks fluency, and his use of words is sometimes inexact—occasionally the inexactness of ignorance, as in calling an old woman whose husband is very much alive a "dowager." The point is not pettily pedantic; a novelist of to-day should at least know the meaning of common words. To come upon such a misuse jolts one, like biting on a tack in a spoonful of pudding.

H. L. PANGBORN.

STILL LIFE. By J. Middleton Murry. E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE literary or dramatic critic has often been defined as the man who, having tried to write himself and having failed in the creative attempt, thereupon turns to telling other writers how to do it. Mr. Murry is a very distinguished literary critic in England, widely known both in academic circles as a university lecturer and in the popular press as a reviewer and commentator upon things in general. This novel is his first venture into fiction on his own account, and it demonstrates that critical facility does not imply lack of creative ability, for it is a very much better novel than most of those Mr. Murry has been obliged to criticize. But it will appeal only to a limited audience, since it is most emphatically a psychological novel and aimed only at readers who are capable of following long, minute psychological analyses of the states of mind of the various queer people whom he has summoned to his Freudian clinic.

The London Times has called the Mr. Murry of this book a "Freud among the fairies," but it is difficult to see anything of fairyland here. It is rather a nightmare country of the soul, full of good, bad and indifferent dreams—much more Freud than fairy. It is concerned with the progressive experiences of a supersensitive young man, Maurice Temple, who sets the keynote in his reflection, at the beginning: "Oh, yes,

you've cut out women, and you're so frightened of them that you're absolutely their slave. . . . The only solid thing you've got left is a mad desire to keep women out of it." Naturally, from such a beginning Maurice at once finds it necessary to run off with the first woman he happens to meet, who is Anne, the wife of his friend Craddock. The rest of the book, more than four hundred pages of fine print, is concerned with the psychoses of this runaway couple and of several other similarly prepossessed men and women with whom they come in contact. It has action enough to carry it and there are some highly dramatic situations, but for the most part it is the portrayal of a mind—first one and then another, male and female—in reactions to sex impulses and "complexes."

It is enormously adroit, so subtle as to make, for instance, the analytic performances of a D. H. Lawrence look like a schoolboy exercise in psychology. Mr. Murry is an undoubted master in this business, and he is also capable of a direct, clear and fine edged diction, a lucidity that is usually lacking in such work. But the book remains a mental clinic.

ROLLING ACRES. By Bessie R. Hoover. Small, Maynard & Co.

THIS new story by the creator of "Pa Flickinger" has a genuinely Dickensian flavor; as racy in its way, in its treatment of the mildly humorous, lovable, plain folks of the middle West as the greater novelist's handling of queer people. Not that these are at all travestied; but Cicero, the handy man and friend of the family, is distinctly a "character." So, too, is Nabbie, the "help," and Cicero's perfect proposal of marriage can safely be compared to the affair of Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy, though Cicero and Nabbie would have been an "uncomfortable couple," had she accepted him. There is a nearer parallel, also, in the once popular and still immensely readable stories by J. T. Trowbridge, in Mr. Pipkin and Miss Wamsey in one of the "Jack Hazard" tales.

The plot of this is cleverly built around an aristocratic Englishman, heir presumptive to a barony, who has come to America and married into a plain, but efficient middle Western family. His daughter, Viola, is the titular heroine, but interest does not centre exclusively in her and the pleasant love story is not allowed to take up too much room. Mr. Lybrook, the expatriate, has become a very good American, but is not prosperous. There is a mortgage on the farm, and other complications, and he explains, sadly, that he fears he has been too concerned with "spiritual values" and has not been a good business man. Of course, it all works out nicely in the end, and even though Lybrook comes into the title it is not a cheap or conventional ending and remains an American story.

All the people are very well done, with fine, sympathetic understanding. Its humor is eminently sane and genial, and has the warmth of wholesome, unaffected interest in every day, normal human beings, not allowing their whimsicalities to overshadow the rest of their makeup. There is also a minute attention to little detail that reminds one again of Dickens; a keen eye for the small but sometimes significant little things, out of which a complete picture grows. The story is a refreshing variant from the most of the commoner modes of the day in fiction. It has its slight, occasional crudities, but one does not mind them. One charm of the thing is its quiet unpretentiousness in contrast to the spectacularly posed attitude of a good many younger writers.

THE CORTLANDTS OF WASHINGTON SQUARE. By Janet A. Fairbank. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company.

HERE is a story which might have had for a subtitle "This Freedom Sixty Years Ago," for its heroine is a girl who contrives to manage her own life, despite the scandalized protests of her would-be guardians. The scene is New York city in ante-bellum days, when Washington Square was fairly well uptown and the Forty-second street reservoir frankly out in the country. Yet in looking back over the story one realizes that the atmosphere of the period, though for the most part well sustained, is not the key to the book's undeniable charm; neither is the plot, which, while adequate as a connecting thread, sounds fairly familiar when reduced to its bare elements: The tribu-

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